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Obey OFFERS ADVICE TO SPASH GRADUATES

Tells Students: Nation Needs You To Be Idealistic, Informed Citizens

STEVENS POINT, WI – Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI) addressed the graduating class at the Stevens Point Area Senior High School commencement ceremonies today, congratulating seniors and telling them the country needs them to be idealistic, informed citizens to deal with the challenges ahead.

“The events of September 11 have already changed your world in ways you never dreamed of. Those events should tell you that your education is not ending; it’s just begun!” Obey told the graduates. “In dealing with this new reality, your country will face difficult and complicated questions. Your leaders cannot make those decisions alone. Democracy is not a

spectator sport. It cannot function without an engaged and informed citizenry.”

“But remember,” Obey added. If you participate in our democratic system without informing yourself about the issues our country faces, you are a menace, not a responsible citizen.”

The most patriotic thing a citizen can do over the long haul, Obey told the crowd, is to go on a learning binge. “Shed indifference! Become an alert, aware, and involved citizen. Learn as much as you can about other religions, other countries, other societies, and learn a lot more about your own. Learn about the lives and the problems of people who are different from you,” he said.

“This is a great country and we’re all proud of it, but I hope you’re not satisfied that we pay the average Fortune 500 CEO almost 500 times more than we pay the average factory worker” and several hundred times what we pay the average school teacher, who has chosen the most important profession in society,” Obey said, noting that he agreed with Barack Obama when he said recently that we live in a culture that “too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained; a culture where those in power too often encourage these selfish impulses.”

That’s why, Obey said, he has a sign in his office that he asks people who come in to read. It says “What do you want me to do for someone besides yourself that is more important than

whatever it is you want me to do for you?"

"We can do better. . . I hope you will be part of the effort to change things like that," Obey challenged the graduates. "If you are looking for ways to express your patriotism " if you want to do more than simply wave the flag in a soon-forgotten celebration " we all need to spend a lot less time thinking about 'me' and a lot more time thinking about 'we'."

"And when election time comes around, do yourself a favor," Obey added. "Don't choose leaders who offer you easy solutions or who promise the most to you. Look for those who ask the most of you."

In their personal lives, Obey told the graduates to remember that making a living is not that same thing as living. "Discover what gives you enjoyment, peace, and satisfaction," he said. "Be as ambitious about discovering who you really are and what you really care about as you are about getting ahead professionally. In life, the trip is as important as the destination."

Obey concluded by noting that there are two kinds of people in the world " givers and takers. "The best way to feel good about yourself in your own life is not to see how much you can get out of life, but to see how much you can put into it," he said "That's life's true reward."

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